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# HOW I LOST MY JOB AS A PREACHER



By J. D. M. BUCKNER  
Aurora, Nebr.



# How I Lost My Job as a Preacher

*J. D. M. BUCKNER*  
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This booklet may be secured from C. V. Howard, 31 Nassau street, New York City, or J. D. M. Buckner, Aurora, Nebraska, by remitting fifty cents.

“Higher Criticism and the Christian Life” may be obtained by remitting twenty-five cents to the author, J. D. M. Buckner, Aurora, Nebraska.

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J. D. M. BUCKNER

Born September 25, 1855.

Licensed to Preach, 1880.

Began Preaching in Methodist Church, 1883.

Retired September 9, 1922, by Nebraska Methodist Conference at Omaha,  
Bishop Homer C. Stuntz, Presiding.

Gift

Author

NOV 14 1922





J. D. M. BUCKNER



## WHY THIS BOOKLET IS WRITTEN

After nearly forty years of service as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church I have been retired by the Nebraska Conference over my protest. The reasons for this are here set forth. This booklet would not be worth my time to write or your time to read if its object were merely to expose a piece of individual injustice. Such personal injustice as was suffered, such unfairness as may have existed in denying me a trial, such disingenuousness as may have been practiced in the invocation of a retirement clause written and always employed for an entirely different object, were all incidents to the larger purpose on the part of Bishop Stuntz and his cabinet to suppress liberal thinking and liberal preaching in the Methodist church in Nebraska. I feel that this latter issue is worth my writing about and worth your reading about because it raises questions of far-reaching importance to the future of the church in all denominations.

For many years there has been a fight on in all denominations between what are commonly called the "new school" men and the "old school" men. Speaking in a large way this fight until very recently has been limited to preachers and professors. Church members have not been let in on it.

The new school men do not believe in the verbal, literal, inspiration of the Bible; they believe in the historical interpretation in the light of the times when written and with consideration given to the education, character, and vision of the different men who wrote the bible. Consideration is also given to the methods of copying and recopying, translating, and retranslating, the Bible during many centuries. This attitude towards the Bible and the study of it as sacred literature is commonly called

“Higher Criticism”. The old school men believe in the literal, verbal, inspiration of the Bible; that every statement in the Bible must be accepted as literally true because inspired.

Another disagreement is even more important. The new school men believe that the modern conception of religion should be one of personal service to fellow-men. The old school men, while of course approving of such service, continue to lay primary emphasis upon personal reward.

New school men accept the demonstrated conclusions of science in the fields of geology and biology. Old school men reject these conclusions in so far as they feel that they are contrary to the geological and biological accounts found in the Bible. The world was created in six days, because the Bible says so. Man was created as he now is and not developed, because the Bible says so.

In the Baptist church after a conspicuous struggle reported at length in the daily press the new school men achieved a victory in the recent Baptist Convention at Indianapolis. In the Presbyterian church the struggle is an old one, with Union Theological Seminary (no longer officially connected with the church) leading the forces of liberalism in so far it has furnished teachers and students urging the modern views on these questions. In the Congregational church Dr. George A. Gordon for a generation has with tongue and pen been a notable leader of liberalism. In the Methodist church also there have been many outspoken leaders of the new school, among the ablest and most influential of which may be mentioned the late Dr. Borden P. Browne, formerly Professor of Philosophy in the Boston School of Theology. On the other hand, Mr. L. W. Munshall for twenty-five years has been doing his best to hold the Methodist church in rigid adherence to the old dogmas and traditions. In



“Methodism Adrift” and “Breakers Ahead” he has given effective voice to the old school view. I have believed and preached the views advocated by the late Dr. Bowne. I believe that the hope of the Methodist church and of all churches lies in the triumph of the new and modern conception of the Bible and of the function of Christianity as applied to the modern problems of a torn and disordered world. I am opposed to Mr. Munhall’s views, opposed to the teachings of his books, and believe that the triumph of the old school would turn back the clock of progress and cripple the church forever.

### HOW IT HAPPENED

For twenty years I have openly taught the views described as those of the new school men. I have believed that these views should be preached to my congregation and not limited to closeted conversations or controversies among preachers. I believe it is wrong to believe one thing and preach another. I believe it is wrong to believe one thing and keep discreetly silent so that the impression is created that a man believes another thing, even if he does not expressly say so. I believe that ministers are harming the church and corroding their own characters when they privately concede the error of an assumption and yet by silence or by dodging or by the use of big words perpetuate what they honestly believe to be a deception. For those old school men who sincerely believe the views they espouse I have respect. I think they are wrong and I am sure that progressive views of the Bible and religion will eventually triumph, as they have already triumphed in many places.

At Aurora, Nebraska, as pastor of the Methodist church, I have preached the beliefs of the new school

men for eleven years. In May, 1922, I sent an article entitled "A Good God" to the Omaha World Herald, the Nebraska State Journal at Lincoln, and the Hamilton County Register, the Aurora Republican, and the Aurora Sun, at Aurora. This article was printed in all of these papers at or about the same time. It follows below:

### "A GOOD GOD"

"Aurora, Neb., May 26.—To the Editor of the World Herald: A good many years ago I decided God was good. This conclusion was reached from two sources: The teachings of Christ and my own personal experience. As I studied the teachings of Christ and my own personal fellowship with God I decided my God is good. That faith has grown with years and I believe it more strongly today than ever in my life.

"When I read in the Bible anything which reflects on the goodness of God, I do not believe it. All scripture must be measured by the life and teachings of Christ. When I read that God killed all the people in the world except eight with a flood, I say that does not sound like my God. When I read that God told the Hebrews to kill all the Canaanites and take their property, I say my God is a missionary and seeks to save men, not to kill them. Why should I believe that story coming out of the dim past, painting God as a cruel tyrant, any more than I should believe that God told the Germans to kill the Belgians and steal their property?

"When I was pastor at David City and we were studying the conquest of Canaan, a girl asked me if

it were right for the Hebrew soldiers to kill the women and children. I said 'No.' Then another girl said, 'Why did God tell them to do it then?' I said 'God never told them to do it. The writer was mistaken.' I have been asked many, many times why God hardened Pharaoh's heart ten times and then brought ten plagues upon innocent people which caused untold suffering. For twenty-five years I tried to fix it up, but always failed to satisfy the people or myself, until finally I had the courage to say, 'God never did it. My God is good.'

"When I read that God commanded David to number Israel and he did it, but God was angry with him and killed 70,000 innocent men with a plague, I must defend God against that charge and answer, 'He never did it.'

"When I read that a few peeked into the ark and God killed 50,070 people of a child-race for that offense, I said it could not be true.

"When I read that story about Korah, Datham and Abiram when they told Moses and Aaron that God would speak to all the people and not only unto them, that God was angry with these men and opened the earth and it swallowed them up with all their families, sent fire and burned 250 men up who had offered incense to him, and then in his wrath smote the people with a plague that killed 14,700 of them before Aaron could appease God with a burning incense, I say 'This story can not be true, for my God is better than Aaron, Moses or any other man.' I cannot believe that God killed 185,000 of the Assyrian army one night, that he told Joshua to hock the horses, that he told the Jews they could sell spoiled meat to the Gentiles but not to the Jews,

that he commanded that if a boy did not obey his parents he was to be killed, that if a man gathered sticks on the Sabbath to make a fire he was to be stoned to death, and that if anyone worshiped any other God he was to be killed. None of these things is like my Heavenly Father. It is no virtue for a man to believe these things which paint a bad God, even though they are found in the Bible.

“One passage in the Bible, ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,’ was believed for so many centuries that it is estimated 350,000 people were killed because people believed that was the law of God; our own American soil was stained with the blood of witches. The judge and the preacher who said ‘We do not believe in witches neither do we believe that is God’s law’ were condemned as infidels and enemies of God. The passage is still in the Bible, but we do not believe in witches nor the law that killed them.

“How did we get our Bible? First a religious folk produced a religious literature; second a religious folk selected the Bible from that literature. Now we have a religious folk that interprets the Bible. I must stand with Christ and his teachings and with my own personal experiences with God and all scripture must be measured by this standard. All the problems and questions in life which are constantly meeting us must be settled on the basis that God is good, and all other questions adjusted to that standard. I can only believe in a good God. I can love, admire, devote myself, worship, follow, obey only a good God. All theories of life must make God good or else I cannot accept them.

J. D. M. BUCKNER,  
Pastor M. E. Church, Aurora, Neb.



This article was printed apparently in other papers, because I received letters from different parts of the country concerning it. Articles in opposition were sent to the above-named and printed. Shortly after the publication of this article, I received the following letter from Bishop Homer C. Stuntz:

(Copy)

Methodist  
Episcopal  
Church

Omaha  
Area

HOMER C. STUNTZ  
Resident Bishop  
320 City National Bank Bldg.  
Omaha, Nebraska  
June 14, 1922

Rev. J. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

My dear Brother Buckner:

I am both amazed and shocked at your letter entitled "A Good God" which appeared recently in the World-Herald. I did not happen to be in the city when it appeared and only within the last few days has the text of it been brought to my attention.

I do not know what the Conference may decide to do about such an unprovoked and unwarranted declaration of disbelief in the word of God. Already it has brought you into unfavorable publicity wherever it is discussed in our own Church

circles. It is certain to have the effect of making your appointment more difficult this next fall.

Yours very sincerely

(Signed) Homer C. Stuntz.

I did not reply to this letter.

During the winter and spring of 1922, I decided that it might be well after eleven years of service at Aurora to remove to a new charge. I had served the church at Aurora for a longer period than any Methodist minister had ever served a church in Nebraska and I felt that it might be better if I should preach the views I held to a new group for a while and also felt that Aurora should have the benefit of a new preacher. I called twenty of my leading members together and submitted my plan. Nineteen of them were opposed to it. Nevertheless, I continued to think and talk about it and convinced many more of my members that my plan was best, although some continued to oppose it. My quarterly conference, composed of officials in my church, on August 22, 1922, unanimously voted for my return, although it was understood that if satisfactory arrangements could be made with Bishop Stuntz for me to receive an appointment satisfactory to myself, the move would be made. It was also understood and constantly expressed by my leading members that if the Bishop's letter to me augured a disinclination on his part to give me a satisfactory charge, I should ask to be returned to Aurora and they would demand it. I should explain for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the Methodist Church that the presiding bishop has arbitrary power over the appointment of ministers to different churches. This power is not often abused. Nevertheless, when

a Methodist church wants a particular preacher to serve them, their wishes must take the form of a request to the bishop instead of an offer to the minister himself. The congregation has no voice in the matter if the bishop wishes to exercise his autocratic power.

With the plan and understanding in mind as outlined, I announced that I would preach my farewell sermon on September 3rd, 1922, that being the last Sunday before the annual conference of Methodist preachers at Omaha. I had stenographic notes taken of my sermon, not with a view to current publicity, but because I desired to preserve my last words in a church where I had enjoyed the longest and most successful pastorate of my forty years career as a minister.

A lawyer at Aurora named F. E. Edgerton, who is a friend of mine though not a member of my church, was present at my farewell sermon. He made a short synopsis of it and sent it to the Omaha and Lincoln papers. This was without my knowledge, although I would have had no objections to it if I had known it. In the meantime I had gone to the conference at Omaha where reporters sought me out, handed me Mr. Edgerton's synopsis of my sermon, and asked me if it was correct. I stated that while it was very brief and while some statements did not include the elaboration or qualification given in the complete sermon, yet it could be fairly said to be an accurate short synopsis of my sermon and my views. The reporters had with them a photographer and asked me to pose for a picture which I refused to do. Apparently they snapped me when I was not looking, because the next day there appeared in the Omaha papers a picture of myself while talking to a reporter. I wish to make clear that while I knew nothing about Mr. Edgerton's sending the report to the papers, I had no ob-

jection at any time to anyone's knowing what I believed, whether the conference was in session or not in session.

A synopsis of my farewell sermon, an even briefer account of which was published as described above, here follows:

### FAREWELL SERMON

"I take two passages for my texts: 'And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'—'Wherefore, Oh King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision'.

"Jesus said to his followers that they should seek the truth and the truth would make them free. The implication is that the great purpose of man is to seek truth.

"The other text was the testimony of the Apostle Paul when on trial, when he was persecuting the Christians he was a pharisee, and thought he should destroy the followers of Jesus, and said he was conscientious in this work, but when he was on the road to Damascus God showed him that he was wrong and the Christians were right. He testified as a prisoner that he had obeyed the truth which God had revealed to him.

These two texts teach: First, the best thing to believe is the truth; Second, We ought to have a heart that will respond to God and say, 'Let in the light and I will walk in it; reveal the truth and I will obey it.'

"I desire to speak on the difference between an old school Christian and a new school Christian. These terms are colloquial. The two groups are ex-



pressed by various terms. For twenty years I have been a new school Christian and before that I was an old school Christian, so I should speak with some authority.

“A few years ago four young men who had graduated from Union Theological Seminary were to be ordained by the New York Presbytery and were to go as missionaries. In their examination they were asked if they believed in the virgin birth of Jesus and they answered ‘We will not affirm neither will we deny’. Some of the ministers wanted them to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but they would not do it. The Presbytery ordained them and they went as missionaries. This brought trouble between the New York Presbytery and the general church, so the General Assembly passed a resolution requiring all graduates of Union Theological Seminary to take a certain amount of work in an orthodox Presbyterian school before they are ordained.

“A few years ago the Methodist Episcopal church appointed a commission to select a course of study for our ministers. On that commission were some of the leading educators of our church with two Bishops, and they selected a good course of study but some folks raise the cry “Heresy” and got two or three conferences to enter a protest and asked that certain books be taken out and the commission discontinued.

“Last June The Northern Baptists held their convention in Indianapolis where two thousand delegates assembled in the interest of the church representing thirty-seven states. The old school calling themselves “Fundamentalists” sought to control the convention. J. C. Masee, of Boston,

was the chairman of the Fundamentalists and took three years to work up their program. They wanted to elect all the officers and Boards from the Fundamentalists, and to adopt a creed which all ministers, teachers and missionaries would have to subscribe. Mr. Masee sent out a pastoral letter to all pastors to send "independent" delegates to the convention. He then arranged a program one day before the convention opened with five addresses all from Fundamentalists. The Fundamentalists controlled only three states out of thirty-seven and the creed was lost by a two to one vote. The progressives organized for the fight and controlled the convention. W. H. Faunce, President of Brown University, said that the Baptist church had been saved to the intelligent, educated, people of the world. The Baptists have always boasted that they have no creed, but each man must answer to God for his faith and duty, and yet here was a great organized movement to prevent freedom of expression.

"The question is, was it better for Christianity and the Kingdom of God for the progressives to win out or for the Fundamentalists? I think the progressives stand for more truth and righteousness than the Fundamentalists, so I vote for the progressives. I am referring to these incidents to show that the fight is on in all the churches between the new school and the old school.

I want to discuss for a little while the difference between a new school Christian and an old school Christian, for there are Christians in both groups.

"There are two theories about how we got our Bible. The old school believes that God dictated the

Bible to men and they wrote just what he said, whether they understood it or not. They believe the Bible is the word of God and is infallible. They assume that there were no mistakes made by transcribers who for centuries produced all the new Bibles and also no mistakes made in translation, so that we have the exact words of God spoken to the writers. They say, 'You must believe it all or none.'

"The new school accepts a different theory of the Bible: First a religious folk produced a religious literature; then a religious folk selected our Bible from that literature; now a religious folk interprets the Bible. The new school believes that inspiration is measured by intelligence, faith, devotion; that as these men sought God and lived in fellowship with Him their minds were illuminated as ours are now, but not to the degree of infallibility. Therefore, every book of the Bible is valued by its contents and must be measured by the life and teachings of Christ.

"We ask three questions about every passage of Scripture: Who wrote it? When was it written? Why was it written? You can see that these two theories differ very much. The Bible is a great book; it contains great truths, inspiration, history, fables, legends, poetry, and many things which are not to be taken literally.

"You remember I wrote an article a few months ago on "A Good God". You all want a good God, you believe in a good God, but some of the things which the Old Testament says God did are pretty bad, and if a citizen of Aurora should do them we would be

shocked. I am compelled to believe either that God was once bad or that the record is wrong.

"The history of the Bible is not very accurate, the ethics are defective, the moral standards not equal to ours. As the ethics of the Hebrews developed, their ideas and institutions improved.

"We find the science of the Bible is not in harmony with the discoveries of science today. The men who wrote the Bible thought the world flat and the sky solid.

"I have asked my men's class if God could feed the starving children of China; some said 'yes, God can do anything.' I said 'What would you think of a father in Aurora who would let his children starve to death when he could feed them?' God must have **men** to feed the starving, to build hospitals, churches, and to save the world. God depends upon us.

"I believe that Jesus came to live and teach men about the Father, to reveal the Father and make known His will and that the Jews killed him because they hated him.

"The old school believes that Jesus came to die as a sacrifice in order to soften the heart of God and make Him willing to save man. I believe that saviorhood is as strong in the Father as in the Son and that God sent His Son because He loved man.

"The old school believes salvation to be ready-made and to be secured by believing certain things and performing certain ceremonies; that it takes place in the courts of heaven. I believe salvation is progressive and takes place in man. By cooperating with God he is able to overcome sin and to practice virtue. It is the indwelling Christ that saves through



fellowship. A man is saved in the degree to which he is good. No ritual or ceremony is valuable unless it improves one's life.

"A few months ago when I had forty men in my class, I asked them this question: 'Two men lived to be sixty years old; one was a good man; honest, sober, virtuous, benevolent, kind, a good husband, a good citizen, a good father, but not a member of the church and had never confessed Christ as his savior. The other man was bad; a thief, a liar, a drunkard, a libertine, a wicked man, a bad citizen, but on his death-bed three hours before he died he called upon God to have mercy upon him as a sinner, confessed Christ, and was baptised and received into the church. How many think the good man has the better chance in the next world?' Thirty-seven voted for him and three for the bad man. Of course, you instantly think of the thief on the cross. Three men give us that history: Matthew and Mark say that both thieves railed at Jesus, but Luke says that one prayed. Shall I believe Luke on the one hand or Matthew and Mark on the other? Except for Luke's contradicted account, Jesus never touched on this great subject during his ministry. Do you think Jesus would have deferred the announcement of so great a principle which affects vitally life and destiny to the last moment of His life and then declared to a heathen that he could substitute the last hour of his life for a lifetime of wickedness in which he had lived and moulded his destiny.

"You remember that man in the East who invited his wife to take an automobile ride, drove to a lonely spot, stopped the car and shot his wife to death, but before he was hanged he confessed Christ

and fixed it up with God so that he went direct to heaven from the gallows. Such faith is a burlesque on Christianity and drives many good people from the church. I would go and pray for a dying man and would baptize him and receive him into the church but I would not tell him or others that he had as good a chance in the next world as a good man. Character determines destiny.

“I want to say that creeds are a good thing if used for stepping-stones but a curse if used to bar progress.

“If you ever attended a revival the evangelist appealed to the emotions and urged his hearers to get religion so they would be saved from hell and go to heaven when they died. That is an appeal to the selfishness of people and the man who responds to that motive will never get very high. Billy Sunday uses both appeals. After emphasizing the heaven and hell appeal, he says, ‘If you young men standing back there have any red blood in your veins and will fight oppression and for righteousness, come down here and give me your hand.’ That is the new appeal of the new school: ‘Get religion to be useful and to render service to your fellow-men.’

“In closing I want to say that I have not been disobedient unto the heavenly vision. Forty-two years ago when I stood face to face with God in settling the question of preaching, I promised God if He would let in the light I would walk in it; if He would reveal the truth I would obey it. The thing I have always wanted to know was the will of God and I have been ready to do it at any cost. I have lived up to that pledge to this day. None of you has ever asked me a question about my faith that I did

not answer. I have played fair and been honest in my preaching and teaching.

"I have given Aurora eleven years of the best of my life and have greatly enjoyed my pastorate here. Throughout I have received your zealous cooperation. I have done my best for the church, the town, the county. God bless you!"

On the night of the day that a brief report of the above sermon appeared in the Omaha papers, I was called before Bishop Stuntz and his cabinet, consisting of the following superintendents: Dr. J. H. Clements, Dr. M. E. Gilbert, Dr. E. M. Furman, Dr. J. G. Shick, Dr. E. T. George, Dr. J. R. Gettys, Dr. J. W. Kilpatrick, Dr. J. W. Embree. They had copies of the Omaha papers before them. Then Bishop Stuntz asked me if the report of my sermon was a correct report. I replied that in the main it was correct. I stated the circumstances as narrated above, but did not state that I regretted the publication, because I did not. Bishop Stuntz stated that the publication of my article entitled "A Good God" followed by this newspaper report of my sermon just as the conference was opening, looked like a slap in the face, an open defiance, and as if I were telling him and the conference 'Do your worst.' Dr. Gettys said in substance that I ought to withdraw from the church; that I did not believe in the doctrines of the church and was doing great harm; that he would withdraw from the church if he were in my position and believed as I did.

I may pause here long enough to say that several years ago Dr. Gettys told me that his views and my views were not two inches apart, but that there was this difference between us: that whereas I talked about it all the time, he talked about it none of the time.

I mention this not as a personal matter, but only to illustrate what I consider the very worst feature of the struggle going on in all of the churches, namely, the conspiracy of silence, by which many educated and well-read ministers consider it impolitic to preach or write their real views. There can be no progress where such a mistaken policy prevails.

I stated to the Bishop and his cabinet that my views were not out of harmony with the Methodist church and that if anyone thought they were, I was entitled to a trial. Dr. Furman said, in substance: "We have not had a heresy trial in the Methodist church for fifteen years and we do not want one." Bishop Stuntz said, in substance: "Heaven knows, we do not want a heresy trial. The papers and magazines would give great publicity to it and it would be much easier for Brother Buckner simply to retire voluntarily, as he can do at his age." Dr. Furman stated, in substance, that if I had not published my article "A Good God", and if the report of my sermon had not followed, they could give me an appointment, but that I had been very indiscreet. I replied to him, "You would not want me to cover things up just to get an appointment would you?" He made no reply.

I stated, among other things, that leading pastors, writers, and professors of our church believed just as I did because I had learned all my views from them as well as writers of other denominations. To support this I gave the bishop and his cabinet the names of prominent Methodists, living and dead, who had written and spoken the very things for which I was being criticised. These names will be found elsewhere in this booklet. The only reply to my contention in this respect was that of Bishop Stuntz who said to his cabinet, in substance: "Brother Buckner is a good student. I have been in his study. He has



a fine library." The discussion lasted an hour and a half. Nothing was discussed except my published views on the Bible and theology and the repeated urging that I voluntarily retire. One statement in the published account of my sermon was to the effect that I did not believe that God sent two she-bears to devour forty-two playful children, because they shouted "Bald head" at Elisha. I had said in my sermon that I preferred to take the words of Jesus, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." I asked Bishop Stuntz directly if he believed the story about Elisha. He did not answer.

I argued with the cabinet throughout that I should not be asked to retire merely because of differences between us. I told the Bishop that I had been preaching about as long as he had and that the proper way to handle the situation was to permit the new school men in the church and the old school men in the church to both have their say. I repeated to him what he had said to the conference in another connection that although you differed from a man you should keep on loving him. I stated that without freedom of expression there could be no progress in any institution.

I narrated to them a personal experience as follows: When I was a young Methodist preacher in my twenties I attended a Republican county convention and offered a dry plank. A saloonkeeper got up and said that if I did not agree with the Republican party, I ought to get out of it. I told him that neither he nor I owned the Republican party and that the only fair thing was for us both to stay in the party and each continue to offer his plank and that perhaps at some future time a majority of the party would adopt a dry plank; that the Republican party was a wet party or a dry party in accordance with the

wishes of a majority of the party. This illustration the bishop and his cabinet said did not apply.

I then gave another illustration: I told them of a native of India who was lecturing in my pulpit many years ago, and said that the reason why this country was far ahead of India was because the priests of India were compelled to preach word for word the language of their ancestors whereas in this country the clergy were permitted freedom of thought and freedom of speech. No comment was made upon this illustration.

As I left I said: "I have three things to say—I have no thought of withdrawing from the Methodist church; I will not retire; I want an appointment."

The next morning the secretary of the cabinet read to the conference a resolution of the bishop and cabinet that I be referred to the committee on conference relations for retirement. The text of this resolution is not available at the moment but I have stated it in substance. I have never heard of a bishop and cabinet making such a recommendation. I had not before supposed that a man could be retired against his will without charges made against him. As I was quickly to learn, however, upon looking the matter up, a man may be retired without his consent by a vote of the conference. I have not as yet had any case called to my attention where this law was invoked under circumstances similar to these. (For the benefit of non-Methodists I should have before explained that the conference is composed solely of ministers.)

To the committee on conference relations therefore went the recommendation of the bishop and his cabinet. The normal function of this committee is to pass upon applications for retirement which preachers make in regular course for various reasons. I appeared twice before

this committee, each time for nearly an hour, and was closely questioned upon my views on the Bible and theology. Nothing else was discussed. At no time was any mention made of any of the normal reasons for retirement such as ill-health, age, etc. No one pretended that any such reason existed. I repeated my demand for a trial. I repeated my assertion that my views were in harmony with the leaders of the church as could be established upon a trial. Most of the committee urged me to retire voluntarily to save my reputation. I said that whenever I had read of a preacher resigning or retiring when charges were in the air I always thought he was both guilty and a coward. The chairman said he agreed with me but that his committee had no authority to recommend a trial as the sole thing referred to them was the recommendation of the bishop and cabinet for retirement. One of the members severely criticized my publication of a letter of mine in which I took a position opposed to that of Mr. Bryan on the evolution issue. He said I had no business to go outside of my pulpit and write a letter for publication. He contended that Mr. Bryan in fighting evolution was defending the Bible against attack and that it was the duty of all ministers to support him.

While the committee on conference relations was still considering my case, my church at Aurora had been apprised of the progress of events and the pulpit committee of the church at Aurora called Bishop Stuntz on the telephone to request my return to Aurora. I am informed by a member of the pulpit committee that after a few words on the telephone Bishop Stuntz stated that he was very busy, could not talk with them on the telephone, and that they should put what they had to say in a telegram. They sent the following telegram, which was re-

ceived by the bishop before any action had been taken by the committee or by the conference:

### CONFIRMATION

#### THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Aurora, Neb., 9/8 1922

Bishop Homer C. Stuntz,  
Sanford Hotel,  
c/o Methodist Conference,  
Omaha, Nebraska.

Aurora Church desires return of J. D. M. Buckner.

S. B. Otto

A. E. Siekmann

C. S. Brown

S. C. Stephenson

Glenn Anawalt

Pulpit Comm.

On the day after this telegram was sent and received by the bishop the committee on conference relations reported and recommended my retirement. I addressed the conference briefly both before and after the report came in. I recounted in a few words my pastorate at Aurora; how the salary had been increased during my time there from \$1200 to \$2500 besides the parsonage; how the benevolences contributed for the benefit of the church societies and funds at large had grown from \$300 to \$3000 for three consecutive years; that I was a man of one job; that my pulpit committee had wired the bishop the day before asking for my return and that the bishop had received this wire; that if nearly forty years faithful service in the Methodist church amounted to anything I hoped they would not retire me in the prime of life. I said nothing about theology or the Bible. All understood the real reason for the proposed action. No one else spoke either for or against the report. The recommendation to retire was carried. This was a foregone conclusion



from the beginning, since the recommendation for retirement had originated with Bishop Stuntz and his cabinet.

When this news reached Aurora the official board met and adopted resolutions. I was still at Omaha and had no communication with any member of my church. My first knowledge of this action came from an Omaha paper which on September 12 contained the following news article:

“Special Dispatch to the World-Herald.

Aurora, Neb., Sept. 11.—Resolutions denouncing the action of the conference at Omaha in retiring the Rev. J. D. M. Buckner, pastor of the Methodist church here, from the ministry, were passed at a meeting of the official board of the church this morning.

The resolutions are signed by the following board members: S. B. Otto, E. W. White, G. Anawalt, Ralph Otto, S. C. Stephenson, D. W. Call, Chas. E. Peterson, R. Peterson, H. E. Toof, G. E. Funk, H. R. Worthington, C. W. Wood, J. W. Haworth, H. H. Leymaster, R. M. Cooper, C. S. Brown, A. E. Siekmann, C. R. Scovill and B. W. Woodford.

The resolutions read:

“Whereas, the Omaha conference of the Methodist church has seen fit to retire from the ministry the Rev. J. D. M. Buckner, who for eleven years has been a faithful servant of God and of the church here in Aurora, Neb., and

Whereas, this action of the conference removes from the Methodist ministry of Nebraska one of the strongest, ablest, most earnest and sincere preachers of the church, and

Whereas, the Rev. J. D. M. Buckner has for thirty-eight years served as a minister of the Methodist church and with great heart has ministered to the suffering and privations of the poor and distressed and has demonstrated in the eleven years of his service in Aurora that he is a great-hearted, broad-minded Christian gentleman and scholar, Be It

Resolved, by the official board of the Methodist Episcopal church of Aurora, Neb., that we unqualifiedly denounce the action of the conference at Omaha in retiring Dr. Buckner; And Be It Further

Resolved, That we hereby announce our loyalty and the loyalty of this church to Dr. Buckner, and pledge him the support of this church in any struggle that he may make to re-establish himself as a minister of God in the Methodist church; Be It Further

Resolved, That we insist that the conference reconsider its action and place Dr. Buckner again on the roll of the ministry and that it again assign him to a responsible charge in this conference."

### Says "It's a Dirty Shame"

"The congregation was stunned here by the action of the conference relative to the Rev. Mr. Buckner's retirement and general indignation was expressed. While a few members did not approve his alleged liberal belief of the Bible, they loved him for his big-heartedness and feel that he has been unjustly deprived of his right to preach in the church.

"The Rev. Mr. Buckner for several years has conducted a Sunday school class for men, which was an open forum for religious, political and social questions and had a regular membership of fifty men. The class met Sunday and spent the entire hour denouncing the conference's action.

"It is a dirty shame," declared one prominent member. "They treated Buckner like a dog. I'll not be party for such a thing. They can't send another man here after such a dismissal of Buckner and expect us to grin and say nothing and stay in the church I look for this Sunday school class to be dissolved within a month after the new pastor takes charge."

#### "Threaten To Leave Church"

"Some members asked the official board to employ the Rev. Mr. Buckner in spite of the action of the conference, while others say they are through with the church. Among these are some of the heaviest contributors.

"Messages urging Buckner to make a fight for his rights and expressing support have been sent him by many members.

"A reception is planned for the Rev. Mr. Buckner and his wife upon their return from the Omaha conference."

I wired the official board as follows, as reported in the press:

"Omaha, Neb., Sep. 12.

"Glen Anawalt,  
Secretary Official Board Methodist Church,  
Aurora, Neb.

"Mrs. Buckner and I deeply appreciate and are greatly moved by the resolutions adopted by you

yesterday. I urge you not to permit the piece of Prussianism by which I have been denied a pulpit in the Methodist church without trial to cause you to lose sight of the larger issues involved. While my fate naturally is of large personal concern to me it is of no particular consequence to the great cause of progressive Christianity and liberal interpretation of the Bible. That cause can best be served by your continuing the fight for freedom of speech and freedom of thought inside the Methodist church.

“In all denominations the struggle is on and the modern school is making rapid headway. Do not be discouraged and do not give up the fight. To strangle intellectual conviction for the sake of so-called orthodoxy is a delusion and snare. Many of our own pastors privately concede what they publicly denounce. That way lies ruin.

“I am delighted that Goman has been assigned to you. He is a splendid young man and many years ago when I was district superintendent he was one of my boys. Be as loyal and true to him as you have been to me. Home the end of the week.

J. D. M. BUCKNER.”

I was retired Saturday forenoon. I went to Woodbine, Iowa, to fill an engagement in the Methodist pulpit there on Sunday morning, made a month earlier. Omaha papers carried the following account of the sermon:

“The Rev. J. D. M. Buckner, 67, of Aurora, a Methodist Episcopal minister for forty years, who was retired on a pension Saturday by the Methodist conference cabinet because of “progressive” views on the interpretation of the Bible held by him, oc-



cupied the pulpit at the Methodist Episcopal Church of Woodbine, Ia., Sunday at the request of the pastor there.

"Taking as his subject God's query to Moses, 'What is in Thy Hand?' the pastor spoke briefly, explaining to his congregation how best to bring God to earth and touching briefly on the new theories for which he has been criticised. He made no allusion to the action of the conference cabinet in retiring him.

"In God's query to Moses which Moses answered by saying, 'My rod' there is a story, an inspiration and a task. Moses has but a rod with which to do his Father's bidding. He used that," declared the Rev. Mr. Buckner.

"God wants that man should use himself and all that belongs to him for service. He should dedicate his culture, his health and his money for service, the bettering of lives of others.

"There are three things in the task to bring God down to earth in spirit and in teaching. We must lift the race up, force truth to the top and bring heaven into men.

"The church is not to transport men to heaven; it is to transform them. We should be more concerned with getting heaven into men than in getting men into heaven. We should strive to get hell out of men rather than to keep men out of hell.

"This last statement is in accordance with the new theory of religion," added the pastor.

To reporters who sought to interview me and asked many questions I replied that their queries could best be answered by three statements which I would prepare on

successive days on "How I Feel," "My Creed," and "What I am Going to Do." These statements received wide publicity and may be of interest here. I include them as they appeared in the press.

### "HOW I FEEL"

"I have been retired by the Methodist conference because of the doctrines in which I believe and which I have preached for fifteen years, the last eleven of which were served at Aurora, Nebraska. I should greatly have preferred a trial with formal charges, with opportunity to make my defense and before a jury of the conference charged with the responsibility of going into all the facts and rendering a verdict.

"I made a request for a trial to the committee on conference relations which recommended my retirement, stating to them that I could not accept their suggestion that I retire voluntarily because whenever I read of a preacher resigning or retiring where there are charges in the air, I always thought he was both guilty and a coward.

"I stated that in common justice I should be tried if my doctrines were believed by anyone to be out of harmony with the church and that I believed I could establish that my views were in complete harmony with the views now held by the leaders of our church.

"I made this same statement in substance to Bishop Stuntz and his cabinet when they suggested that they did not want a heresy trial in this conference with its attendant publicity and that this could be avoided if I would retire voluntarily. This I re-

fused to do, believing that every man is entitled to a trial, a hearing, an opportunity to defend himself and to abide by the verdict of a jury. Any other course is un-American.

"I am just as loyal and devoted to Christ and his kingdom and the great Methodist church and the work in which she is engaged as I was before my enforced retirement. It is unfair to judge a great church by the action of a small group. I am grieved to see by a dispatch in the press that members of my church are indignant at the action of the conference and that many of them may withdraw from the church. I shall advise them to remain loyal and to continue their adherence to the church.

"Bishop Stuntz in admitting some young men to the conference said 'When you do not believe the doctrines of the Methodist church you will get out, won't you, and not remain in and eat Methodist bread while preaching doctrines contrary to the church.' While many leaders of our church and many professors in our Methodist schools preach and teach exactly the same doctrines which I do, yet the object of this question was not lost on anyone who heard it. I may add in this connection that many members of my church at Aurora have joined the church, according to their own statements, wholly because of my progressive preaching. One of these men contributes \$1,000 a year to the church and two others \$500 each, and others smaller amounts, and one gave \$10,000 to the Wesleyan endowment fund at my request, so that at least one Methodist pastor and one Methodist bishop have been permitted to eat Methodist bread furnished by progressive Methodists who joined the church because of progressive preaching."

On the day following the publication of the above the papers carried

### MY CREED"

#### What I Believe

"I believe in a personal God, who is doing His best with man, bringing light, comfort, and strength to every man in proportion to his surrender, faith and devotion. I believe in the personality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit through whom men are saved.

"I believe that conversion and santification are only the beginning and not the end of a religious life.

"I believe that salvation is not something completed in the courts of Heaven and handed to man readymade, but is rather a process wrought out in the lives of men through Jesus Christ, who came to manifest the Father and to reveal his will to man.

"I believe that faith, repentance, and prayer are to affect man and not God. God is always willing to bless men. He does not have to be persuaded.

"Ritual and ceremony are only valuable as they improve the lives of men. Creeds are a blessing if used as stepping stones but a curse if employed to bar progress.

"God is seeking to make men good. Character determines destiny.

#### What I Do Not Believe

"I do not believe that all the Bible is equally inspired. Inspiration is measured by the intelligence as well as by the faith and love of the writer. No revelation is made until it is understood.



"I do not believe that God stopped His revelations when the Bible was completed. He is still revealing himself in the inner consciousness of men.

"I do not believe that some of the stories in the Old Testament reveal the will and character of God. I believe rather that they only reflect the conception of God held by the writers of that time. I give only a few illustrations:

"I do not believe that God told the Hebrews to kill the Canaanites, men, women and innocent children, and to confiscate their property.

"I do not believe that God told David to number Israel and that when he did it God became angry with David and sent a plague and killed 70,000 unoffending men.

"I do not believe that because a few curious men peeked into the ark God became angry and killed 50,070 innocent men.

"I do not believe that God caused two she-bears to devour forty-two playful children because they shouted "Bald Head!" at Elisha.

"The ethics and moral standards of the Old Testament must be measured by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ."

On the following day the press printed my final statement on

### “WHAT I AM GOING TO DO”

“More often than any other question I am asked what I am going to do. So far as making a living is concerned I do not yet know. I have not hunted a job for forty years and therefore my personal technique for job-hunting is undeveloped.

“Aside from the bread and butter job, my chief work will be to continue to preach and teach the views of what is now called the new school of religious thought. There is nothing new about it because the fight for modern views has been going on for a long time. Over twenty years ago Professor Mitchell of the Boston School of Theology of the Methodist church was chloroformed by the Methodist bishops but only after a substantial vote in his favor. He found an opportunity for freedom of teaching modern views in another school. Since then many of our Methodist professors have taught views and held their jobs from which they would have been ejected a few years earlier.

“While the struggle between reactionaries and progressives concerning the Bible and the mission of the modern church in a modern world is going on in a number of denominations, the most conspicuous fight of recent years is that just concluded in the Baptist church. For three years the ‘Fundamentalists’ as the standpatters called themselves prepared for the struggle. Last June in the most notable religious convention of many years the progressive Baptists won out, and in the words of W. H. Faunce, president of Brown University, they “saved the Baptist church for educated young men.”

“Until twenty years ago I was a stand-patter and believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and that every word in it was literally true. My own evolution of thought has been due to association with and teachings of prominent officials, pastors, professors, and writers of the Methodist church and other denominations. With many of these men I have talked. I have read the books of many others. In the Methodist church among these I mention the late Bishop Vincent, Professor Boren P. Bowne, John T. McFarland, editor of Sunday School literature, Chancellor D. W. C. Huntington, and Professor Milton S. Terry. Among the living are Professor Bronson, Professor Franklin H. Rall, Professor W. J. Davidson, Professor Albert C. Knudson, Dr. Beebe, Professor Brightman, Dr. David G. Downey, Book Editor of the church. Twelve years ago I wrote a little pamphlet expressing my views called “Higher Criticism and the Christian Life” which contained the same statements for which I have just been retired by the Nebraska conference. I read this pamphlet to Bishop Edward Hughes and Dr. Downey who approved it and Dr. Downey offered to authorize the publication of the pamphlet as regular Methodist literature. I did not feel that it was in final shape for permanent publication at the time. I am certain that our Methodist schools almost without exception take the position of the new and modern view of the Bible and the function of religion in twentieth century life.

“The action of the Nebraska conference in seeking quietly to retire me without the formality and showdown of a trial is not typical of Methodism. It

shows only an eddying backwater in the onrushing stream of Christian thought in the Methodist church.

“The most unfortunate thing in the general controversy over the country is that many of the stand-patters privately concede the truth of the views which they oppose or concerning which they keep the silence of discretion.

“A member of Bishop Stuntz’ cabinet which recommended my retirement without trial said to me within recent years, ‘I believe just what you do but there is this difference: You talk about it all the time and I say nothing about it.’ I have had pastors and teachers say to me, ‘We all believe as you do, as every modern educated man must, but we do not believe it is best for the church or the common folk to say anything about it.’ To all of which I have replied and now reply: What is the use of digging for gold except to enrich the world? What is the use of climbing for vision unless you are to tell what you see?

“Therefore by every possible means I intend to preach progressive Christianity for the rest of my life. That is what I am going to do.”

I am receiving daily many letters from all parts of the country approving the views of the Bible and religion as expressed by the new school men and approving my refusal to retire upon request, although knowing what the result of my refusal would be. My attention is called from time to time to editorial comments upon the subject. As a matter of interest I have collected in an appendix to this booklet a few of these personal and editorial expressions. It would be impossible to include any considerable number.



As I write, it is just two weeks since I was retired. I have tried to keep my head straight and my heart right. From the fortnight's perspective there are four things which paragraph themselves in my mind:

**First:** The least important, and one which I have tried to rise above, is the sense of humiliation that after nearly forty years of service I was retired, in vigorous health, against my will, and in the face of a telegraphic request from a congregation which I had served for eleven years that I be returned to them. This request of the rank and file as well as my demand for a trial, with opportunity to defend myself, were of no avail against the quiet domination of church officials, conceived and executed the plan for my elimination, without charges, defense, judge, jury or counsel, all of which are provided for in our church. I was retired by the convenient use of a provision in our law designed for a wholly different purpose. I am confirmed in this because within forty-eight hours a high official of our church has stated to me that the use of the retirement clause in my case to cloak a heresy charge was an abuse of the law and unfair. Fortunately there can be no dispute on this issue, since it was frankly admitted, both by the bishop and his cabinet and by the conference relations committee, that the only occasion for my retirement was my views and their publication.

**Second:** Far harder to bear is the suffering of my wife, who for forty years has worked unceasingly by my side in every field of church work. Even the bearing and rearing of children and her exacting household duties did not encroach upon her tireless efforts in religious activities. Feminine tact has ever smoothed over masculine blunders. Such success as I may have attained as a pastor would have been impossible without her inspiration and help. To see her so sharply cut off from the

work she loves, to see her sacrificing service brought to so abrupt and humiliating an end, to witness her heart-broken efforts to pick up the threads of life and duty in a setting other than a Methodist parsonage, cause me to pray for sweetness of spirit and for a clear vision of those larger issues involved here, which far transcend in importance the mere personal sense of injustice on the part of a country preacher or the personal tragedy of his wife's forty years of religious work brought to so sad a close.

**Third:** Taking up these larger issues—Serious social and religious consequences flow from the intimidation and terrorism shown in the foregoing narrative. Men will be afraid to speak. I know personally many men in the Nebraska conference who think as I do. I assume that they were afraid to rise and express their views. Many of them are young men with wives and children to support. The action of the conference is a notice served upon its members that no difference of views will be tolerated. This embargo upon freedom of thought and freedom of speech thrusts back progress. At the same conference Dr. Titus Lowe, a high official in our church, said to the assembled ministers. "If you have doubts, keep them to yourself." If this advice had been followed by religious thinkers, scientists, economic and political writers, for the past hundred years where would we be today? This advice is to tell a man if a candle is flickering feebly in the dark to blow it out quickly for fear he may see something.

Intolerance inside the church is to-day the worst foe of the church. To bind the brain and gag the mouth is to render static the intellectual life of our ministry. It prevents the church from attacking modern problems with modern tools.

Old school men are always taunting new school men to pick up and leave the church if they do not like it. They confuse the identity of the church with the identity of their own group. Dr. Stratton of New York was reported in the papers last summer as serving notice that he and the rest of the Fundamentalists proposed to drive out of the Baptist church Professor Shailer Matthews, Dr. Fosdick, and other progressives whom he named. New school men are perfectly willing to have the old school men remain in the church. This is natural since they owe their views to freedom.

Tolerance is the great need of religion to-day. It acts as a solvent of differences of opinion, permitting brotherly co-operation on the great common ground of non-controversial church activities, and it makes possible gradual progress in religion to keep pace with the gradual progress of man.

**Fourth:** Crowning all other thoughts in my mind is optimism for the future of progressive Christianity. I insist that the evidence is clear that the action of Bishop Stuntz and the Methodist conference in Nebraska is a local affair. Some other bishops might have done the same thing. I know that many would not. I am defending the Methodist church at large against unwarranted assumptions from this particular incident. I know the Methodist church better than any other church and that is why perhaps I feel that the field for progressive Christianity to-day in the Methodist church offers great opportunities. My knowledge of the attitude of Methodist theological seminaries, my knowledge of the writings of leading Methodist pastors and professors, my knowledge of the views of many Methodist bishops, make me a firm believer in the present program and ultimate success of the new school of thought in the Methodist church. I

firmly believe that the hope of the church and of a world restless and disorganized by war lies in the modern view of the nature and function of religion.

J. D. M. BUCKNER.

Aurora, Nebraska,  
September, 1922.



# APPENDIX



(Copy)

RABBI JACOB SINGER  
Temple B'Nai Jeshurun  
Lincoln, Nebraska

September 10th, '22.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebraska.

Dear Sir:—

I have read your remarks relative to the Bible with keen interest and delight. Needless to say that I am in agreement with you in the position you have taken, that a reverent attitude toward the Bible does not lie in the position taken by obscurantists in all churches. The ethical crudities of the early Biblical portions, and the patent contradictions have repeled many a fine soul from the religious organizations of our day. Amos did not agree with the priests of Bethel, nor did the author of the Book of Job accept the theology of his censors.

I cannot follow the issue from the standpoint of one affiliated with your denomination; but I feel that more is involved than a controversy over doctrine. Many stay out of God's work because they cannot surrender their intellectual honesty. Weaker souls, I fear, are compelled either by necessity or sheer inertia, to compromise with their conscience. Reactionary theologians unwittingly are placing a premium on dishonesty. Your fine stand is a source of pride and encouragement to many who believe with you that "God is nigh unto all who call upon Him in truth."

With best wishes for the vindication of yourself and for the high ideal by which you are actuated,

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) Jacob Singer.

P. S. In reading your statement I recalled Mr. Montefiore's opinion. "The Bible", he says, "is a spiritual gold mine. But not everything in a gold mine is gold."

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(Copy)

NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

University Place, Nebraska

Department of Philosophy

Benjamin D. Scott

September 11, 1922.

My dear Dr. Buckner.

I can not refrain from writing you at least a line of appreciation at this time when a good many men in Nebraska Methodism appear to be singularly short in the matter of appreciating the splendid service which you have rendered the church and the Kingdom in this state for so many years. It seemed to me quite impossible that the conference could take in your case the course which was taken. I sincerely regret that I was not able to be present at the session, for, though my voice would probably have availed not at all, I should most certainly have raised it in protest against what I consider an inhuman outrage.

I have read with very great satisfaction the loyal resolution which the official board of the Aurora church prepared and addressed to the conference. I congratulate you heartily upon having won such staunch friends and



champions among the men with whom you have labored for so many years. I most sincerely hope that the matter of your retirement may not rest as it now stands, but that the case may be reconsidered speedily. Nothing short of your early reinstatement and appointment to a responsible charge in the conference could clear official Nebraska Methodism, in my allowance, of guilt for having inflicted an exceedingly grave injustice upon one of the most stalwart and consecrated men in her ministry.

Very cordially yours,

(Signed) Benjamin D. Scott.

P. S. You are privileged to make of this letter any use which you may care to make of it.

B. D. S.

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(Copy)

NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

University Place  
Nebraska

Rural Leadership  
W. L. Ruyle

September 12, 1922.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Neb.

My dear Dr. Buckner:

I did not get to see you after the steam roller did its work. If you were where you could see you may have seen my hand among what the Bishop said were "three in the opposition". I am not writing this to console you for when a man is right he does not need consoling. Rather

I am writing to console myself. I have boiled for three days and my fever is still rising. I want to say that I feel like a boob for not standing up and demanding that the committee state the cause for their recommendation.

At any rate the fight is on and knowing you as I do I do not expect to see you sit down and see the parade go by, or rather over you. As far as I have been able to gather from what I have read from your pen and what I have heard from your lips you and I agree with the leading thinkers of our church. Garrett, Boston, Drew, and Illif all teach men to look forward rather than backward and that is the way I want to be looking as long as there are any looks left in me. I am hoping that you STICK.

Sincerely yours,  
(Signed) W. L. RUYLE.

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(Copy)

ILLINOIS COLLEGE  
Jacksonville, Illinois

September 10, 1922.

My dear Mr. Buckner:

I have seen a notice or two in the Chicago Tribune of your flurry with the powers in Nebraska. I know little of what has been going on, none of the details of the late years, but I have long known of your forward and intelligent attitude and your efforts to keep in the vicinity of truth, even hard truth. My dear friend Smith, a few years ago, told me something of your work at Aurora and spoke in warmest admiration of you and the work you were doing there. I recall too that you were for a year my superior as a young minister in Wesleyan and

the feeling I had about you, the confidence, and the respect which no other superintendent ever had. I have long since dropped all conference relations but I think possibly something else might have been the sequel if I had men of your character as guides, although I know that teaching and not preaching is my work.

Please accept my warmest regards which your fight gives me opportunity of expressing. You cannot have fought fruitlessly. But it raises interesting problems and I hope some day I may have an opportunity of talking with you.

Best wishes,

Cordially yours,  
(Sgd.) R. F. Swift.

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(Copy)

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA  
Lincoln

June 22-22

Mr. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Dear Sir and Brother:

I was so very much pleased and encouraged by your communication to the last Sunday's Journal that I must tell you about it.

Your ideas of God and his justice and mercy are exactly as I have believed and advocated for the last dozen years.

All these years I have attended S. S. at the Elm Park M. E. Church and have been all but cast out for being unorthodox. I had never met any one in full sympathy

with myself so you can readily see how glad I was to find my old friend Buckner on the right side with me.

There may be many more M. E. Ministers that believe as you do but you are the first within my horizon that has had sufficient courage to speak out.

I want to thank you and join with you in the great truth, **God is good and never evil.**

Hope to read more from you.

With best wishes,

J. K. Litton,  
829 So. 27, Lincoln

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(Copy)

O'Neill, Nebr.  
Sept. 13-22.

J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Dear Sir:

I do not know what belief you held which caused the action the Conference took, but my hat is off to any man that will gain the respect and confidence of his people as you have done in the eleven years of your residence in Aurora.

If by entertaining the views you hold will do the same for all Methodist ministers, and bring to their people the same confidence in them as you have inspired in your people, I would suggest for the good of humanity that all preachers of Methodism adopt the same views as you. I am with you and with every man that sees the needs of men rather than church creed.

Yours

(Signed) Geo. Bressler.



(In Camp Coeur d 'Alem Forest)

Prichard, Ida., Sept. 9, 1922.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Dear Sir:

To my way of thinking you have done a very noble thing in speaking your convictions so frankly regarding the orthodox beliefs. I am a firm believer in Christianity, was brought up in the orthodox faith, but even as a child I could not believe those absurd things to which you referred. My experience is that most people I meet in different walks of life believe sincerely in Christ and His teachings, but they will not go to church for many reasons, one of the main being that the church tries to make them believe old and new testaments alike.

What a golden harvest the church of today would reap if they, the clergy, could formulate a faith based on Christ's teachings and accept scientific facts regarding the origin of our planet; at least what we know for certain of its geologic history. All men are religious at heart.

Yours sincerely,

Yale '08.

J. A. Larson.

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### The Suppression of Doubts

Omaha, Sept. 10.—To the Editor of the World-Herald: Titus Lowe, D. D., looking down from his dizzy height of a \$7,500 job, plus expenses and free entertainment, says that he "has doubts—but don't preach them." The Rev. J. D. M. Buckner, no D. D., and minus a \$7,500 soft job who pays his own expenses and entertainment, frankly admits that he sincerely doubts any idea which represents the Deity as other than a sympathetic, loving

Being and isn't going to back up for anybody. Thank God for such men as Buckner, no D. D.

They are going to "examine" into the orthodoxy of Buckner, but who is going to examine the orthodoxy of the examiners? I don't know much about churchology and care less, but when I go to church I want to feel that the preacher is giving me full measure of his convictions, including "doubts". Perhaps before this gets into print, Buckner may be fired from the Methodist conference, but he will remain in the respect of those who value truth and are not afraid to express it, D. D.'s and fat jobs notwithstanding to the contrary. F. G. Langley.

[I do not accept the philosophy of Dr. Titus Lowe: "I have doubts but I do not preach them". Doubts and beliefs are so closely woven together that you cannot separate them. Men need light. They want to know if their pastor believes certain things which other men doubt. I received several letters about this declaration of Dr. Lowe. I am certain he had no reference to me or my case which was pending but it was an expression of his policy of life which I can not admire and against which I want to enter my protest.—J. D. M. B.]

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### PAISLEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Alfred A. Wood, Ph. D., Pastor

Unadilla, Nebraska, Sept. 20, 1922.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner, D. D.

Aurora, Nebr.

My dear Mr. Buckner:

I cannot refrain from extending to you my hearty congratulations. Instead of pitying you, I envy you your position. Could you have served the Aurora church as

pastor to the end of your days, your personal influence, and the cause of truth and free thinking would have affected a very limited circle, compared to the same as a result of the action of your Conference. Today the name of Dr. Buckner, and that for which he stands is known and discussed in thousands of homes and public gatherings throughout the length and breadth of our country.

Were you discredited by your church, who know you so intimately, with so many years of exceptional service among them, charged with some immoral, or other un-Christian act, it would be vastly different. But with those wonderful resolutions passed by your church, and following the statement at the conference, which I read: "There are no charges against Brother Buckner," that they should vote to debar you from, or at least refuse you a pulpit in the Nebraska Conference, is certainly a very unusual thing. I doubt very much if there is anything in the Methodist Discipline, or Methodist law, that can deny a Methodist minister of proven efficiency, and under no charges whatever, a pulpit. I write this as one having ten years of experience as a Methodist minister, and a careful reader of "Merrill's Methodist Law".

You certainly did the right thing in advising your people to be loyal to the church, as these independent organizations in a community never result in advancing the cause of Christ.

As to a "job". You certainly need have no cause of anxiety along that line with the multitude of vacant churches, and even as a lecturer, with all your free advertising, people would be glad to hear this "Dr. Buckner" of whom they have read so much. After all, what is it all about? So far as I can learn, you claim that God, whose name and character is love (according to the New Testament), "cannot contradict Himself". That is, He

cannot be the author of deeds fundamentally unrighteous, wicked and criminal, but rather, as you say, these statements simply reflect the conceptions of God, by the writer at that time. Why, this is no new theology! This has been the accepted belief of all broad minded men, in and out of the pulpit for many years. The historical study of the Bible has revealed this fact long ago. Had the Methodist church "retired" every Methodist minister who holds this view, what an exodus there would be from her ranks. While I do not believe you are the kind of man who seeks to play the "wounded hero" act, or the martyr's role, simply in the interest of truth and justice, I do not think you ought to leave the matter where the conference left it. At present, the public, at least very many, will believe that you have been cast out of the ranks of Methodist ministers as unfit to occupy a pulpit in their conference. The issue should be sharply drawn, and be published, that the public be not deceived. "Preach the Methodist doctrine."

What is the Methodist Doctrine? Is one of her doctrines the literal historic accuracy of every statement in the Bible, especially the Old Testament? If so, let it be known.

Just to identify myself, I will say that I am a graduate of Oberlin College, a graduate of the Boston University School of Theology under the teaching of that great Hebrew scholar, Professor Mitchell, class '88, with four years Ph. D. course in the University of Chicago.

With best wishes,

A. A. Wood.



Hastings, Nebr., Sept. 13, 1922.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Dear Sir:

I have been much interested in you since I first saw an account in the papers of your farewell sermon before going to Conference at Omaha, and I want to say that I am sure you are on the right track and it is to just such men as you that the people of this day are looking for a better, a broader, and more progressive Christianity, one that people can live, and not feel that they are smothering their better judgment in so doing. Anyway, why should we use the best judgment we have about everything we do, and then when it comes to religious matters, cast the whole thing aside and do like the Chinese used to do, by believing and doing only as their ancestors did for centuries past.

I want to congratulate you on being a man that is willing to do what he thinks is right regardless of what he has been taught.

I am past the half century mark myself, and I want to say that if we live another twenty-five years, we are going to see much of what such men as you are having the courage to start, so don't be discouraged for I am sure God has a great work for you.

I have been a Methodist most of my life until a few years ago when I felt I could not be bound down to any typewritten belief that an organization might tell me I must believe or be lost, and have never felt the love and trust in God that I have since this conclusion. I hope you will write many sermons for publication and hope I may get to read them.

Believing you have the greatest work of your life before you and wishing you abundant success, I am

Faithfully yours,

Robert L. Cook.

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Lincoln, Nebraska, Sept. 17th, 1922.

Dr. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebraska.

My dear friend:

I have been reading with great interest every word that has been printed in relation to the action of our conference at Omaha, Nebraska.

I want to confess to you that I am not at all perturbed, because I believe that this action of the Nebraska Conference of our church may prove to mark another great milestone in the march of Christianity in its efforts to free itself from the slavery of doctrines and creeds that were written before the world had been permitted to see the vision of a real Christianity.

If the church could only come to realize that RELIGION IS A LIFE, instead of a belief in doctrines that have been handed down from generation to generation, how much better it would be, not only for the church but for the world.

Dr. Buckner, the best thing that I know to say to you is that I believe you have laid the foundation of a monument to your own life that will be as enduring as the Rock of Ages, and I hope God will spare you until the shaft you may build upon that foundation shall rise high enough that the whole Christian world may see it

and glorify the God of Truth above the doctrines of any church. You are ripe in years of study and service, but this must not be the end of those services, but the beginning of a wider, richer field of labor.

With the best wishes of myself and wife, I am  
Sincerely your friend,  
Otto Mutz.

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HOWARD PALMER YOUNG  
Pastor of  
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Woodward, Iowa

Sept. 16, 1922.

Dr. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Dear Bro. Buckner:

I have noted in the State Journal the trying times you are having with the powers that be. I felt moved to write a line to you and let you know that I firmly believe in the justice of your contention asking for a trial.

I have traveled the path of a complete change of thought from the most conservative theological position to a very liberal attitude of mind. I cannot help seeing that the church must come to this position. We are, however, embarrassed by a creed which is unchangeable—Discipline—Constitution, Art. XI, section 47. I have wondered how we are to ever get rid of it.

I wish you the success you deserve in your attempt to secure recognition for yourself and the more liberal faith.

Sincerely yours,

Howard P. Young.

Sept. 14, 1922.

Rev. J. D. M. Buckner,  
Aurora, Nebr.

Rev. and My dear Sir:

A dispatch from Omaha of the 9th inst. is authority for the statement chronicled in Sunday's papers, that the Nebraska M. E. Church Conference "retired" you from the ministry, at the age of 64, because of your belief that a "bad man repenting on his deathbed, had not an equal chance of heaven, with a man who had lived uprightly all his life".

Without taking into consideration, or interfering with the religious convictions of anyone, the most astute reasoners of this day and age, cannot but agree with your line of thought on this subject, and it is, indeed, exceedingly regrettable that a contention of this kind should interfere, in the slightest degree with the standing of a pastor, the major part of whose life doubtless has been passed in preaching and it is to be hoped in living, in accordance with the precepts of Christ.

Very sincerely,

Frederick A. Johnson.  
649 West Fifteenth Street,  
Los Angeles, Calif.

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### UTICA SUN

All Kinds of Job Printing

Beaver Crossing Times

Staplehurst Sentinel

Beaver Crossing, Nebr., Sept. 13, 1922.

Dear Mr. Buckner:

Words fail to express our deep sympathy for you in this unpardonable act of Conference. Why a body of men



in this enlightened day and age of the world could be so narrow in their views as to subject you to such humiliation, is beyond thinking. Your people who know you in all your different charges can not help but resent such actions. You have done so much good, and we are sure this will make all who have been under your teaching better men and women, that by their lives they can prove your teachings have been the best. Please know that our faith in you is great and we will never miss an opportunity to sing your praise. With love from the McNeils.  
(Signed) Beaver Crossing.

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**CHIPS AND WHETSTONES”**  
**IN NEBRASKA STATE JOURNAL**  
**(Sunday, September 17, 1922)**

**“Congratulations**

Dear Ex-Reverend J. D. M. Buckner:

If this world needs anything more than another it is men willing to be boiled in oil for conscience' sake. I am a good deal of a coward myself. I have lived more than half as long as you and have not been burned at the stake as often as once. I have just wit enough to feel the disgrace of this. I haven't will enough to correct the lack.

That, I suppose is why I am so joyful over you. I am hoping that your tour into the ditch for something you believe atones in some vicarious way for my weakness for safety first. The proof of the divinity of man that is most convincing to me is the willingness of one of him now and then to forego the flesh for some reward of the spirit. When I see men do that, I know that whatever their an-

cestry, they, or part of them, have cut the link that bound them to it and have embarked on a voyage celestial.

I do not understand the theological issues involved in your case. I do understand that you had your version of the truth and spoke it out and stuck to it regardless of consequences to yourself. I have seen so much dodging and ducking like my own of late, so much trimming of conscience to the winds of convention, that I was beginning to fear that the last man capable of dying for an idea had been shot in the war. Of course you know that if ever that time comes, humanity is gone, metaphorically and literally, to the dogs. But your case has revived me. There are still men who would not rather gain the whole world than lose their own soul.

To you, therefore, reposing triumphant in the ditch, I pay the congratulations and the homage which cowardice ever owes to courage. That you have vindicated your species is the belief of your admirer."

David G. N.

### "CONGRATULATIONS

To the Methodist Conference:

This must be an honest world or perish. I have been worried of late by certain discrepancies between people's professions and their practices. If I get aright the gist of what you did at Omaha to my beloved friend, Buckner, you have greatly mitigated my apprehensions.

As I understand it, your church is committed of old to certain definite and specified theological notions. What these are is no part of the inquiry. Whether it was Jonah that swallowed the whale or vice versa has nothing to do with the case. You have written down that it is one

way or the other; and as long as it so stands, that is the doctrine of your church and of its members. To be honest, the church must enforce that doctrine.

Of all the institutions of the world, a church, it seems to me, is most obligated to be honest with itself and with the world. If that church makes belief in these certain things its test of membership and its gateway to salvation, then honesty requires no less than one thing of you. That thing is that everybody who doesn't believe that way either get out or be put out. Even if that were to leave your church consisting only of the Rev. Titus Lowe there would be no alternative. To say officially that you believe a thing and then act as if you do not believe it, that is bad enough in party politics. We can't do that in religion without raising a stench to heaven.

In the case of my friend Mr. Buckner, you have given intention to stand by what your creed says. A wave of moral enthusiasm engulfs me at the sight. You are embarking upon a long, hard path. I am told that there are several persons of your denomination in Lincoln who dance and play cards, notwithstanding these things are forbidden by your church rules. I heard recently of a minister of your denomination who took his flock in swimming one Sunday after church. What you have done to Mr. Buckner means, I take it that you intend either to revise your rules against cards and dancing and Sunday swimming or purge yourself of these violators of those rules.

Well, what more belongs on a long hard path than a church? The short, easy path, as I understand it, leads to the place the churches exist especially to miss. You have girded up your loins to square your church and its members with its creed. You are to end this going one way with your mind and another with your tongue. The

process begins by putting over the transom a man whom I love as a father and revere as a saint. Well and good. What God has put asunder let no man hold together.

You are preparing your church, I take it, to die if need be for its beliefs. As between my friend Buckner losing his professional life for his faith and your church preparing to risk its life for its beliefs, I am inspired as I hadn't supposed anything in this mussed up world could inspire. And so am sending you as I have already sent to Mr. Buckner, my congratulations and homage. With renewed faith that this will yet be an honest world, I am, yours with fresh respect,

David G. N.

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(Editorial clipping sent me without identifying paper.)

“There can be no ecclesiastical trial of Rev. J. D. M. Buckner because no charges were preferred against him. But the conference did slip one over on him when it voted simply to set him aside, a successful penalizing process without the verbal recognition of any offense preceeding it. In the service more than forty years, with much to his credit, and little against him except his disbelief in the big bear story, we are inclined to think that while it is true, he might have kept still about it, he is no less a godly Christian man because he gave public utterance to the private convictions of almost everybody. At no point does intellectual honesty conflict with that which is vital and sweet and enduring in the Christian religion.



**BUCKNER HAS FRIENDS IN DAVID CITY**

David City, Sept. 12--The stand taken by the Rev. J. D. M. Buckner of Aurora, has been the cause of much comment in David City. He was once the very popular pastor of St. Luke's Methodist church of this city and to him is given the credit of putting David City dry in 1908. He left the pastorate here to become district superintendent. Admiration as to the stand he has taken has been expressed here.--Omaha World-Herald.





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